



Kerrin Mitchell

Today's episode is about how every funding system reflects what it believes is valuable. So in a world where we fund what is easy to measure, what happens to all the things that are essential but impossible to quantify? This is a conversation about grants, but it's also really a conversation about power, resilience, how to design systems that let communities thrive. So we're gonna explore a little bit from the federal arts funding world into nonprofit sustainability, how translating policy into human language may be one of the biggest opportunities that we can bring forward for change.

Olivia Jones

Thank you. I'm so excited to be here. My name is Olivia Jones and I think someone else phrased it back to me most recently, the best way to describe my career. I'm a culture and social impact leader.

Kerrin Mitchell

Were you? No way.

Olivia Jones

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

Love that.

Kerrin Mitchell

I didn't know that about you.

Olivia Jones

I'm super Type A. I'm a rising Virgo for everyone else who knows what that means. And I just was so frustrated with like payroll or when schedules would come or when they wouldn't come or truly like the structure surrounding like the administration. It was all artists who were accidental administrators. And so I very intentionally became an administrator to fix all the things that were making me so frustrated and stressed out because they could be better. But it took someone who wanted to do it, not someone who just had to do it to be able to create.

Tim Sarrantonio

I mean, Olivia, that's an awesome intro and us theater kids got to stick together.

Kerrin Mitchell

I know.

Tim Sarrantonio

I will say that.

Kerrin Mitchell

I was just going to say Tim's like smiling so big right now.

Tim Sarrantonio

So, oh yeah. No, and this is awesome. I was stuck in the back of a chorus line in high school, for instance. So... You know, what one of the things that's fascinating by not only reading a bit about the work that you've been doing, but that introduction is that you have a bit of a rare seat in the work itself, where that public sector grant maker who used to run a nonprofit is also on the receiving end of grants too, right? And so what does that dual perspective let you see about philanthropy, right? When folks are on the other side, like tell us a bit of how empathy meets business practicality as well.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Yeah, there's so many components to it where not only was it an actor, but also a teaching artist and working in education and community engagement. Lots of grants. Love when you do stuff with young people or communities. And they make up these insane rules about how you need to spend money or how you go about things. So there's the perspective of like the way that we structure grants and what we ask you to do as a part of them. I've been on the receiving end of having to build a random program or like do something to satisfy a grant that wasn't fully misaligned with the mission, but wasn't really what we were doing.

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm. Right.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

I say all the time, it should not be a riddle. I'm really grateful that I have a graduate degree in arts leadership. I do that intentionally to gain skills. I love school, but not everyone does. And you shouldn't need an MFA to be able to read like a grant application. So there's the pieces of entering this frame in

order to sort of like dismantle it, fix it, and then go back to some of the work that I also love doing outside of this. So from the perspective of what it's like to read a grant and be like, what does that mean? Everyone kind of has their own language, the curse of knowledge, we see it when we're talking to artists. They're so lost in the sauce of the arts world that I find myself spending a lot of time as a translator of what they're talking about to folks who are not in their world. Same thing, especially with government granting.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. Right.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

There are so many words, so many words that we would never use ever in conversation. Why are they written down on this piece of paper in order to give folks like a path to see like, well, if they don't understand it or they can't do it, then maybe they just won't get the grant and that's a way that they're eliminated from being in the pool of receiving funds and I don't believe that.

Kerrin Mitchell

Wait, dive it into that. Because that's interesting. Because you are, I mean, you've seen that side and now you are in the government. So like, is it something where like, is it like, there's like fiduciary reasons that like these crazy words are selected and you're like, I have to do this. Or is it just people not understanding how to set up some of the systems sometimes that they've been inheriting from, I mean, it's such an interesting, sorry, we're going completely off the question set. I'm like, Olivia, tell us everything.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Love it.

Tim Sarrantonio

Well, one little caveat that I'd love to know, too, is how California is it versus how like other areas in like other rural communities in the Midwest, like just any level of comfort you have in answering that question, I think is also because California is a very obviously special place when it comes to philanthropy.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah. I agree. Yeah. San Diego, especially. And so sunny.

Olivia Jones

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yes, yes. Oh, I've loved the time in San Diego that I've spent from a philanthropic culture standpoint. So, yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yes. Yes.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Yeah, I think that it is a national phenomenon for sure. The way that grants and arts and culture is in Europe is a bit different. Definitely, so different in Australia. So we'll keep it quote-unquote local to the good old United States.

Tim Sarrantonio

Cool. Mm-hmm.

Olivia Jones

And all the language matches the world that you're in. So it is a government language. It's not necessarily untrue. It's just not for the audience who's reading it. It's for the audience who's writing it. And it fits in that world, but it doesn't translate, especially to folks who might not have an entire department focused on it. And sometimes it's really beautiful. And sometimes that also makes it really hard. So I think it's just to make sure that everything that you're doing is for the folks who are meant to be receiving it. And also the folks who are receiving it are different. Nonprofit culture has changed so much since like the creation and origin of them. So yeah, that language is a critical piece if we talk about accessibility and diversity and equity. If you're not making it sort of like universal and plain speaking as possible, you are already infusing your grant guidelines with bias.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. Wait, so let's talk, let's take it the other way, which is all the words that the government, bless their heart, likes to put into things or foundations for them or any funder, like we said, who's trying to say, these are my values. This is my belief or I'm representing these taxpayers. Here's the things I need to know to make sure everyone's feeling good. I mean, what are they in all the words that they're saying? What are the words that they're avoiding right now? Like, what are the things that nobody's going to put out on that table and say, this is the conversation that should be happening that's not in all of the documents and questions and answers you have to go through?

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it's also a very tricky political climate. So there are certain areas, regions, and funders that are choosing to eliminate language based on some of the guidelines from the current administration. And so there's certain information and words that are being eliminated from federal funding, and they're being suggested as something that you eliminate from, like, you know, everything. We have a responsibility in some ways. Like we are often like public facing. All of the things that you could do are public record. So we also are very clear as a group and city and division and department, we have very specifically chosen to continue to use language like equity or really talking about BIPOC folks or immigrant communities and all those sorts of things because it's important to where we live.

Tim Sarrantonio

You know, you got my brain racing because, you know, I've worked for a few different arts organizations. I served on the board of a theater in Chicago, for instance, helped start a comic books and literacy nonprofit. And so, yeah, well, look, and a lot of my perspective has been rooted in more the grassroots side.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Amazing. Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

But, you know, even when I worked eventually at a Catholic school that had a very solid, you know, philanthropic culture, because it was education, there's still a lot of interaction with, you know, the governments. And so, you know, especially with arts, know, I'm fascinated to kind of know how, where do you think the permanent shift in behavior philanthropically might be going? Because one, you can't just look at donations when it comes to support.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Now.

Tim Sarrantonio

A theater doesn't count ticket sales, for instance, as you know a straight donation. And so that's always that always threw off the CRM companies on the individual giving side. They didn't know what to make of it because it's like, but how do I monetize this? And it's like, look, it's a different reason that somebody is becoming a patron. Then you also have private foundations, younger donors who are doing things when it comes to creativity that is showing a lit that might not even be tracked by traditional benchmarking. So from your perspective, you know, the headlines, we almost think and reduce down just the NEA. Right?

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

That's all the arts. That's what's We're screwed because of that. What's the actual reality pulsing in San Diego? Let's kind of drill in and talk about what you're seeing in your own work. What is this mixture of private, public, government funding ultimately kind of settling on in a post-pandemic, you know, 2027 onward look? Like, where do you think it's going to go?

Olivia Jones

Yeah. In San Diego, we are really focused on the creative economy as a whole. So zooming out in that perspective is a little bit different than some of maybe the previous philanthropic focuses, which we're just continuing to support folks who are studying arts and culture, which is obviously a huge piece of that, but it's kind of zooming out of in order to participate in the creative economy. It's also not just philanthropic giving that fuels that. So it's also providing capacity building and tools so that they can generate revenue, diversify their revenue portfolio.

Kerrin Mitchell

And her.

Olivia Jones

So the tools that we provide through capacity building and the support that we provide in funding can also expand their staff or shift their building or help is create stability in a program that is going to provide that sort of distance from a strong reliance on funding stable you know, environment, like federal funding, state funding, local funding, these things that a lot of nonprofits, not just theaters, but all folks kind of were just like, oh, we're going to get it because we're going to get it. That's not true anymore. The pandemic was a huge shakeup for that. And then also the post-pandemic realities of philanthropy. So I think a huge thing is being able to support business resiliency and sustainability with the resources we know we have today so that if there's another shakeup that we are able to manage, that we're able to support and build back. I think that the trends are really in that way of like, what tools do you actually need? It's not necessarily that everyone needs another program for young people. Some people do. If you are a youth performance group, that is probably true. But that's not the only way to support folks. So I think that there's some loosening of the grip of how we say you can spend funds or what it's doing.

Tim Sarrantonio

Mm-hmm.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Olivia Jones

And then also loosening of the grip of how they're returning information. It's not just how many tickets did you sell or how many kids were served. It's also the ripple effects of because of our show or our festival.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. Why does it matter?

Olivia Jones

The businesses in our immediate community are also impacted, like the heat map, of how long people stay, and then also how many people are benefiting. So it's it's all of that. So and San Diego, citywide, we're really thinking of the not just the one, we're thinking about the entire collaboration of economic development and moving forward.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah. Right.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

And culture and creativity is why people go somewhere or why they stay.

Kerrin Mitchell

It's community. And it's the that's the tradition that they carry forward and build from their past to their future.

Olivia Jones

You know.

Kerrin Mitchell

It's something beautiful. I agree. The communities themselves define that.

Tim Sarrantonio

And the data backs this up. There's been studies on as people move, for instance, maybe out of different areas as they settle into a community and live there.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah. All. Right.

Olivia Jones

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

And I'd be interested to know, you know, population, you know, statistics coming into San Diego, how many people, you know, take a while to kind of start to take root there. But as they get more comfortable, they then shift away from the more kind of base sustain about the sustainability things, you know, food insecurity and stuff like that, and get a lot more comfortable focusing on arts, culture. It's like, but I live here, so I'm going to give here type of ethos.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

And a lot of people.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah. How do I reflect myself back and see myself in that same community?

Tim Sarrantonio

And I always view things from the, you know, the philanthropic psychology standpoint, because ultimately even foundations are staffed by people making generosity decisions based off of that. But Corinne, I know there's kind of some larger things that I know you wanted to unpack too.

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm. Well, I mean, I mean I think it's it's it partly is nicely into the next section, which I think ultimately is about what community is its whole. You know, it is an equity, the idea of equity, the idea of

all voices and, you know, all of that moving together in a unified statement, not just the things that it might be the value of a single funder or a single person. I mean, I think that's part of the art form, if you will, that you have to do, Olivia, which is, you know, you steward 300 orgs.

Olivia Jones

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

Thank you.

Kerrin Mitchell

You know, through each year and just as the city of San Diego, but also in your mind too, that things that you've created outside of your job are also arts, you know, or oriented. So how has, or maybe, you know, what has that experience of being a funder taught you about equitable grant making? What it really requires to be able to reflect arts across your whole community. What has it sort of brought forward that you think, you know, again, as measurable as it can be, So what has the experience taught you about where equitable grant making steps in, what it really requires, maybe where it unintentionally distorts things like tell us a little bit about how that reflection of the full community can show up by doing funding and perhaps a different way than maybe usual.

Olivia Jones

Yeah, I think equity in grantmaking requires outside tactics. It's not just giving folks money, but it does require giving them money. So I would love that to be included in an expanded way as a part of our municipal budget process of our priorities. Of We're really lucky that historically we have had you know anywhere between like and million dollars per fiscal year to distribute to folks, which is a lot. We are constantly, you know, circling San Francisco as the largest funder in the state, which is great in terms of like the specific programming for general operating funds. San mo just Francisco has a more expanded portfolio in a different kind of way. But like that's that's cool and exciting, but we still have a lot of organizations and a lot of folks and a lot of things that need support. And what to do with that support. I think there's there's the combination of building and supporting capacity, providing, you know, space or other sort of like tax incentives or opportunities that can also support them if for whatever reason you don't have, you know, hundred million dollars.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah. Right.

Olivia Jones

Of I'm sure we've all seen recently like New York City had their highest funded fiscal cycle for arts organizations that was announced for this upcoming fiscal year, 27. Insane, that's amazing. We currently aren't there yet.

Kerrin Mitchell

Great.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

And so there's other things we could do to support folks. And it's also could be done in partnership. I think there could be a lot more partnership between public and private philanthropy to support that work, where we're collaborating with folks on a program called Artist Count that supports a bi-national community. I work for the city of San Diego. So of course the funding that we are, we are contributing goes to the 15 artists that are from the city of San Diego. But because someone else is managing that program, it means that folks from Tijuana and Baja California can also participate in the program, which is a part of the fabric of our space. So it's also knowing when to like step back of like, okay, we have a dream for this, but I can't take it all the way there. So passing the baton. But I do think like the training and then providing support that outpaces the organization. If your goal is to grow and provide sustainability and resilience, that could be a staffing issue. If they do not have enough money to fund that full staff role for at least the year, then that's not going to happen. And so you're asking them, why aren't you, why are you kind of stuck here? Why aren't you serving more folks? Aren't you moving into a larger space? It's also because of that relationship that a lot of funders have, not just municipal funders that say that you can only have this much because you're only doing this much.

Kerrin Mitchell

Absolutely.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

It doesn't work that way.

Tim Sarrantonio

No, that can get frustrating. On you know I've been working with my mother-in-law, for instance, because I'm establishing a peer learning network, has some connections in San Diego too.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

And she's over in New Bedford, Massachusetts, but she's even, you know one of the questions she raised to me is, we were very successful at our capital campaign. So now we have funders who are going, well, you don't actually need the money. You know, so that's one, it's almost punishing people for success.

Olivia Jones

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Really? Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

And then on the opposite side, you know, irregardless of geography, I've seen some announcements and investments where you know we talk about inherent capacity building. And then I read through what's being focused on. And as chair of the Fundraising Effectness Project, you know we have new data that just came out that yet again, donor retention is a struggle for people. So I know with the average tenure of a fundraiser being 18 months when they first joined somewhere, And that most of the new donors are going out. These capacity building programs are as good as putting money in a barrel and lighting on and fire in a lot of different ways. So I'd kind of be interested to understand those are a lot of different power dynamics flowing together, too. And let's zero in on the arts, though, in terms of like it is intersectional. You know, we talk about food sustainability, for instance, and some of the most effective things that I've seen are when they're partnering up and maybe making a mural that's going to go by the sign where people are picking up all their food.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

Like, these are things that are hard to identify in a grant. So how do you, how have you worked and seen what's effective to draw out the value of artistic expression in impact reporting, for instance?

Olivia Jones

Yes. There's a lot of training in that there's so many different ways to do it is a part of it. And to share authentically has been a huge conversation that we're having this past fiscal year. We received funding from the California Arts Council to be the administering organization for the Individual Artist Fellowship. And that's just really fancy for saying that we select fellows in three tiers.

Tim Sarrantonio

Mm-hmm.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

And you can be emerging and you receive \$5,000 in two years of support of capacity building and training. You could be established and that's 10,000 or you could be a legacy. And that is 50,000. And you get the funding up front and you participate and we connect. Each region where region eight is able to sort of kind of build their program to suit their space. So we're building to support the folks who are selected. So we're building in real time. They were they're recently sort of chosen. We are going to be custom building what they need. But a huge part of it was to share their story in their voice and how they would actually talk about it. Because then it actually comes through instead of trying to put on, you know, this other voice, your funding voice or this thing or, or to transition.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

And like, that's the larger conversation about sort of like professionalism or, or what have you. But it's like, if you use slang to define your art, that's important. We're not looking for quote unquote professionalism. We're working for clarity. And there's so many ways you could do that observation, You could see the change in a room of what happened before you crafted zine about food insecurity in Imperial County. And after when folks had more information about where they can get fresh food locally, but they had no idea about that is art. And in those spaces coming together, there's, there's so much in that of like, you could have a closing poem. If you're like, I'm not counting people, I'm not doing a survey. It doesn't serve me. I am here to teach spoken word. All right. At the very end, have someone either jot it down or record it And every person does a line in that spoken poem that talks to their experience and their arc of what it was like to work with you. So there's a lot of ways that are not traditional that still count as like those benchmarks, as tracking, as that information that's just as valuable and maybe sometimes even more valuable than,

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. Right.

Olivia Jones

Ticket counts. And a lot of that we could also learn from teachers. Teachers constantly are being asked to prove how well they're doing every day, day in and day out. And they've had to create a lot of methods to do that, especially like if you're with a kindergartner, they're probably not clearly filling out a survey on your behalf. So there's so many tools and tactics to collect information, do the one that feels authentic and true to your group.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Olivia Jones

So you're actually getting what you're looking for. And identify what you're looking for and also to actually share in the way you talk about it. If you're going to talk to your community when you're recruiting in a certain way and you're telling me about the program in a foreign language, of course it's going to get messy and fumbled and not come through and as clear as it could. So I will also note for anyone listening, not all funders are like that. Not all funders are like that.

Kerrin Mitchell

Well, I was going to say, like, you asked me about that because, like, I agree, not all funders are like that, but also, like, many are. So, like, this is a very interesting thing, especially for funders who, and bless your heart, funders, if you're listening, too, like, the trust-based philanthropy trend and all of that, like, they're like, oh, we're listening, and oh, we're doing things differently. I mean, the reality is, is arts is still one step beyond that. It's understanding. It's not just, like, I trust you and we can have a phone conversation about this. It's Here's the beauty and the things that exist that are intangible that have, you know, the long tail effect into our community. So I'm wondering, you know, like, have you had to run into that as someone that is receiving funds and giving them away? Have you had to sort of like educate your funders on like this or have? Yeah I figured.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah I'm seeing you not. I'm like, yeah, that makes sense.

Olivia Jones

When I was executive director of the Black Theatre Coalition and for context, the Black Theatre Coalition is an organization that was founded to remove the illusion of inclusion is the phrase.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah, you win.

Olivia Jones

But in theater, we saw a huge trend of like diversity on stage. So lots of like Black, brown actors being incorporated in shows. Their stories potentially being shared for audiences. And then every single person who was working offstage or directing or in the theater or supporting were not black or brown. And the cultural frame of reference to support the show sometimes is so critical to be able to produce like an environment that has like the most, you know, amount of safety for your performers and actors, especially if they're talking about rough content or something else.

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yep, yep, yep.

Olivia Jones

But also like to have that understanding to get them to that place if you're directing or that understanding if you're doing costume or hair or makeup of what it's like to work on dark skin or with, you know, kinky curly hair and all those sorts of wonderful, beautiful things. And so the organization specifically worked to train and place Black professionals in offstage roles. So like whether general managers, producers, marketing, directing, what have you, anything that's not literally on the stage, we're working towards.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

Thank you.

Olivia Jones

And both like fortunately and obviously, unfortunately, the momentum of Black Lives Matter and the We See You White American Theater movement really propelled the organization to grow quickly because people could easily see and understand the need. Then, you know, it's 2022, it's 2023. You know, it's not as like cool, fun, funky and fresh anymore. A lot of folks, it's Black Lives Matter and they're transitioning to focus on the disability justice movement. A lot of philanthropy operates in trends, as I'm sure that you know. And there are some folks who asked us to change the way we're talking about our work. We received a huge grant from a funder that a lot of folks would know And they asked us to change the way we're talking about specifically supporting Black folks as a part of our work. I will say we also didn't exclusively support folks. We had friends who were working on K-pop, the musical, and they're like, can you help us? And I was like, not exactly, but we have friends who that can connect you to, you know, Korean professionals.

Kerrin Mitchell

Okay. Right.

Olivia Jones

We have the skillset and pipeline to make those connections, but that's not our space.

Kerrin Mitchell

There.

Olivia Jones

But we would love to support you in that. So we weren't like fully exclusive. We're all for like, you know, all rising tides raise all ships.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. Right, right.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

But because I used the word black so much in our application, we received it. And then the tides changed by the time funding was awarded. And I was asked to change the application. I've said no, because it's also like not true.

Kerrin Mitchell

Wow. Principle. Yeah.

Olivia Jones

But also like the misinterpretation of that in the same way of like having to go to like the Office of Labor and work with the Department of Labor for the United States government to share about like you can serve protected classes. That's a true thing. And that's how historic black universities work. That's how all sorts of different areas and spaces work. And to continue to have to do justice because the trend wasn't as exciting. I could only imagine if I'd submitted that same application in today's political climate, how many folks would, you know, like, oh, I'm so happy for them, but we might not be able to attach our name to it. So there's there's a lot of growing and work to do where there's folks who are very adamant about, like, continuing to grow and support things. And there's folks who are just like hopping on a trend because that's what other philanthropists are doing or that's what's cool. That's what's going to get the headlines. That's what's going to get them donations so that they could give out grants. So there's, there is a definite world in which that exists. And I'm really grateful to be able to connect with folks and to share that. Like you probably, Don't want that grant. You should apply for one that actually fits the work that you're doing.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. Right. Right.

Olivia Jones

It's a little bit different for like municipal funding and things like that. Where We don't have the ability to fund based on demographics anyway. I think the closest most places could do is like geography or is zip codes. Like you could prioritize like neighborhoods or areas or districts or things that might have been underserved in the past, but that's it. But foundations and individual donors and those types of things, they can just change on a whim. So it's very interesting. But I think if your work is authentic, and like, that's important. I do understand that depending on where you live and what resources you have, you might not always have the ability to pick and choose, but like to be really mindful that is the choice you're making and know when it is, when it's time to cut that off or when it's, when it's something that is possible to. Feed into something bigger. So that was a roller coaster of past times.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

No, no, it was perfect. No, actually, it was really interesting because it brought us back to some of the stuff that I think Tim and I did want to touch upon. So, Tim, I'll let I'll let you kind of take the next one.

Tim Sarrantonio

Well, yeah, because a lot of this is about you know When you talk about equity, a lot of it's also coming back to accessibility, right? Being able to you know have room at the table. Kind of one thing to maybe help connect the last section into this one is I always have the adage, you know build cathedrals, don't put out fires.

Olivia Jones

Yes. Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

You know, and especially in the arts, it's like, what's the plan, right? Because it's such a vulnerable thing. It's a thing that I think a lot of people are uncomfortable about it because it makes them ask deep, hard questions about who they are and what matters to them. And I think one of the things that yeah has been a thread throughout this entire conversation is the ability to be seen for who you are. And so you've worked really hard to make things accessible and throughout your career, what would a world designed around accessibility in grant making look like? Like what would it look like for applicants? But because you're both sides, what would it also look like for funders too receiving these, right? And there's and you can answer that in as broad or interpretive you know specifics as you want to, obviously.

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Yeah. I think that I'm I'm operating as if this utopia is happening within like, you know, the next three to five years. So it's still going to be grounded in a little bit of reality so that hopefully we could get the pathway there.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah, We don't need fantasy world stuff, yeah.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. I think that outside of, you know, having a large amount of like steady income to steward programs for consistency's sake. That's huge. I know that King County, Seattle, the organization for culture was able to implement some, some tax programs so that they have a steady and large influx of funds that have changed their world. So I'm imagining that for everybody. And especially if you're in municipal funding, For foundations, I hope that you find people who really throw down for you and are consistent in that way and that you really leverage planned giving in a way that I think we all need to get better at. So now we've got the money. Amazing. I think the applications need to be clear and simple and easy. You need to collect the information you need to stay legal. So like whatever could get audited, that's obviously

included in the application. We have how-to guides on how to do that, where to do that. We have work sessions, videos, whatever, all the resources in the world. And then we have applications that only ask questions that are relevant to what you're doing. If it isn't, don't ask it. If you're not going to use that information, don't ask it. I feel similarly about final reports. If it's something that's meaningful, like let's say like you're really focused on revitalizing a community and that perspective of how they contribute to that, ask it. But if that is not something that even matters to you, you don't need to hop on a trend to gather information you're never gonna use that's gonna sit in a file somewhere until it disappears. I also firmly believe in like loosening the restrictions on how funds can be spent. So if it can be general operating fund, amazing. If folks can use it on salary, great. If they could use it on toilet paper, great. But to force folks to only spend money in certain ways, that restricted funding is tricky and I think not necessary because life changes. I could fund a program and maybe you have a fire in the building and those funds could be better used to like repair and update your building. I think it's a conversation and communication, but like, you should be able to use the funds to make good decisions because you made good decisions to get here to receive the funding.

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm. Okay. Right.

Tim Sarrantonio

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Olivia Jones

So that's the trust-based philanthropy that I think is like the conversation. It's not just like another listening circle where we change the language in question from Native to Indigenous because someone mentioned it in our third circle and that's our change for the year. It is actually like supporting them freely and openly. And then that conversation of what's needed, what's necessary, what outside of funding is also needed because funding goes directly to an organization is great. But if it is buildings, then if you're a foundation and you can buy and revitalize the space and then provide that to all the folks who were receiving funding last year, Go for it. So I think that there's the, and in a true like utopia funding, like you get the information you need and you build to support the folks in real time. And that might look like something that is the same every year for the next 50 years. And it might look like every year you're changing to evolve and support the folks who are in that network and who are being added to that network and flowing in and out. So I think that's, that is my utopia is that, your whatever listening circle or whatever trust you have is true. If you're listening, listen.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. Yeah.

Olivia Jones

If it's true, be in that way and then create support for them to be able to apply for other programs. I've met with our grantees before to look at other things that they're applying for because I'm aware that I'm

putting them in a unique position. Not everyone is going to ask for your authentic truth. Someone out there is going to score your application lower for using the word dope to describe how cool or amazing your program is. And that is the reality of today. So I know that this isn't the utopia, but I'm also aware of like, well, I'm working towards utopia and I'm really grateful that, well, like, you know, the city of San Diego, I work for them and they're like, not necessarily in this room, but like that I'm getting support from, you know, our team and folks. To balance that reality. So I think it's also like, okay, here's what we got. Here's how we're doing it. We're going to make sure that you can translate this. I can translate. That's my whole job. I could take what you gave to us and tell you how you can spin it so that you can apply for this other thing. So I think it's support, not just through your organization or funding, but the true ripple effects. If you want them to be sustainable and resilient, share the skills that you have or give them the resources to pay for someone to work there that have those skills if it's not you.

Kerrin Mitchell

What are other like small like less fabulous or unglamorous changes that you'd want to see from funders in this realm knowing that I know we only have a little time left but I am very curious about this one are there any other like bits and bobs that people should grab onto sound bites of things they should change.

Olivia Jones

Yeah, I work in a city. There's language I cannot change because we have city attorneys. So what I've done is I've listed the language and then beneath it, I have a table that translates that language into something that is easily understood. Of Like these are the requirements. So you can find ways where like we have to keep this. OK, then you can create a way to translate it. You can make glossaries. Office hours to be able to support. Make sure that everything can be used with a screen reader. If you're still figuring out how that works, offer other resources of accessibility support to everyone, whether they're blind and low vision whether they have autism or other developmental disabilities. Like there's a lot of ways that you could support artists and organizations to apply one-to-one. I think that there's also some, like the colors you choose and their contrast. That's a small thing of how information is there.

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Olivia Jones

Something that I tell everyone to do, whether you're applying for a grant, whether you're creating guidelines, my husband is firmly outside of the arts and is 100% not in funding. He is an engineer and amazing and does other stuff. And I will have him read everything to be like, do you know what I'm saying? Because you're not even in this world in any way. So if someone who, like, not necessarily could care less, but you know what I mean, someone who doesn't necessarily have a stake in the game, yeah, can tell you that.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah. Right. Doesn't know the jargon, doesn't know the stuff.

Tim Sarrantonio

My wife's a fire protection engineer. I completely understand what you're saying.

Olivia Jones

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. Okay.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

And so that's really helpful. I think the same thing with, like, data collection. If you don't need it, don't collect it. And if you are able to provide like all your payment upfront, amazing. We don't need to do reimbursement. If you could do multi-year funding, even better. There's like a lot of small, easy ways that you can support and engage folks in different things. But like anything that you're like, oh, this is kind of annoying. I bet you could do something about it and just do it. Just close that loop.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

So I got one last meaty question for you and then we're going to land the plane with a little game.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yep. Because.

Tim Sarrantonio

So we like games.

Kerrin Mitchell

We like games. We forgot to tell you there's a game. It's two truths and a lie. So you can like answer the really important question that's heavy and very thoughtful.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yes. Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

And at the same point, start calibrating that.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah. Just do two systems thinking, right?

Olivia Jones

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

You'll do this. The snapshot is that you know the next one. So kind of meaty one is you know if you could redirect the sector's attention over the next five years toward an and underfunded or overlooked idea.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

We've touched on a few different potential directions, but what would it be? And if it we got it right, What would the arts and culture space and funding specifically look like 10 years from now that feels fundamentally different? So little fractal idea, Andrew and Marie Brown it. How is this going to ripple into where we could go?

Olivia Jones

Yes. I'm going to go straight into accessibility. I think universal design helps everyone. I'm a huge disability advocate, did a lot of that work when I was in New York in omaha and now even of like creating theatrical performances for folks with disabilities, but also working on the museum access arts and cultural consortium of like supporting any kind of arts and culture org to become more accessible. It is severely underfunded. When we're talking about like program content of anyone who is working training staff, Supporting building, going beyond like the legal requirements of ada Also, everyone says everything's ADA accessible and it's like not. But Like doors will swing the wrong way or different things like that. Building changes are expensive, like to be able to physically make a place more welcoming, more inviting and helpful. So I think like that's just a greatest barrier, period. A huge barrier for arts and culture. We've all been to those teeny tiny seats, those teeny tiny aisles. My husband wears a brace on his left side. And like even in theaters that are brand new, one that I worked at, there was no like rail going down the stairs in the center of an aisle. And so like independently, if you would not be able to walk down the stairs like safely, securely, whatever, without, you know, either going, putting a hand on every chair. Hopefully people aren't in it or with someone else's help, despite that being a space. So in general, I think the way that you play language, sensory guides, I think should just be the norm of how things function, being plain spoken, clear, all the steps. I think funding and fueling all of the tools that make something accessible for folks with intellectual or physical disabilities improves everything else. Imagine going to a museum and instead of having to look up 10 words in the little placard that tells you about the painting, it's just easy to understand and read and clear and con like, it's not like dark gray on black background, like you can just see and read it. Like all of those things improve how something feels.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah. Yeah.

Olivia Jones

All of those things improve feeling welcome. All of those things are also great and supportive for folks who are young, even whether they have disabilities or not. It's also great for aging populations. It's also amazing and great for folks who speak a different language because there's a lot of intuitive markers that don't necessarily rely specifically on language for you to feel that you belong somewhere. And I think funding and fueling accessibility creates belonging. And I think that is also how art works. Some of the most important things about arts, culture, and creativity is that it is a universal language. I know that there's obviously things that have lyrics or poems or writing, but books are translated into hundreds of languages because it's a resonant story. You can go and people are all over the world, go to the Louvre and no one in that room could speak the same language, but they're all looking at the same work of art. Same thing with classical music, whether there's lyrics or modern music, dancing, any of that, it evokes a feeling in place of connection and belonging. And I think if we could do that with our physical spaces, with the way that we engage and interact with one another and the way that we provide the resources to make you feel that you could come in because like someone who wants to go to the theater that is just nervous about the layout. There's also folks like, I don't know, in the Bronx who've never been to Times Square that also are nervous to go to the theater and wanted to know the layout. And it has nothing to do with like autism. It has something to do with being comfortable with where you're headed. So a huge, huge advocate for universal design and accessibility because. That notion reflects the human connection and nature of why we create and connect in general. And so that is an act of creativity is to create somewhere that everyone feels that they can be. So that's my little soapbox.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. I love that. So yeah, I was going to say you just dropped that line.

Tim Sarrantonio

Drop the mic. I mean, yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Heck yeah. Well, Olivia, this was such a joy and I am like, we could go on forever and believe me, Tim and I would. But we do need to wrap up. We have one final part here where it's just two truths and a lie. We always play a game at the end. Every year it changes. This season, this season six is two truths and a lie. So you unfortunately get the dubious on I'm having to choose the two truths and lie. We're going to guess which one is the lie. So do you, I'm sorry, we didn't give you a heads up. So you're just going to have to do this.

Olivia Jones

Okay. That's okay.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah, no research.

Kerrin Mitchell

No research. Yeah.

Olivia Jones

Okay. Would you like for it to be philanthropic related or just like silly goofy?

Kerrin Mitchell

No, the weirder, the better go weird.

Olivia Jones

Okay.

Tim Sarrantonio

It could be whatever.

Kerrin Mitchell

We are Tim and I are, if nothing else, totally weird people. So go with weird.

Olivia Jones

I used to be a cast member at Disneyland. I learned to salsa dance with Lin-Manuel Miranda. I've been in a Minute Maid commercial.

Kerrin Mitchell

These are so good. Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

I'm gonna go with the Minute Maid commercial, being the lie.

Kerrin Mitchell

It's very specific. It's some permutation.

Tim Sarrantonio

Well, they're all specific. It's just, which one do I most want to be true is the Salsa one, so.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yes. Obviously, I kind of want, I really want Disney to be sure and I want to know which character.

Tim Sarrantonio

Or the Disney one.

Tim Sarrantonio

I just, I get a bit of a Disney cast member. Like, I got out of their vibe. I survived. Survived.

Kerrin Mitchell

Some of the most important artists in the world came from a Disney world, but a Disney background. They all are like Disney youth. All right. Let's go with Minute Maid. But I do think that one's correct. I just I want the other two to be true so badly that I'm going to put my weight behind that, too.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah. Yeah. Yep. That's yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

OK, we're going to go three.

Olivia Jones

I was in a Minute Maid commercial with my mom. And then I also...

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh my gosh. What year? Can I ask what year does that date you? I can't. Is that okay?

Olivia Jones

It was like 2017.

Kerrin Mitchell

A.

Olivia Jones

I was in grad school.

Tim Sarrantonio

Okay. Okay.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yes. Okay. I love this for you.

Tim Sarrantonio

All right. Yeah.

Olivia Jones

I was in grad school.

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Olivia Jones

I did learn to salsa dance with Lin-Manuel Miranda. That was really amazing. A part of Black Theater Coalition is that we received funding from the Miranda Family Fund.

Kerrin Mitchell

My gosh.

Olivia Jones

They were going to start a similar program in New York. And so we found someone to help connect to them. And we're like, if you do this, you'll kill us. Please don't. And instead, they supported our work. And then we were able to collaborate and meet their fellows from D.C.

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh my gosh.

Tim Sarrantonio

Oh, good, good, good.

Olivia Jones

And so we got a salsa dancing lesson from the choreographer from In the Heights and got to join in.

Kerrin Mitchell

So funny.

Tim Sarrantonio

So no, no, no Disney.

Olivia Jones

And that is one of the most.

Tim Sarrantonio

No Disney there. Okay.

Olivia Jones

But I did work at Disney World.

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh.

Olivia Jones

It's not Disneyland.

Tim Sarrantonio

Okay.

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh, tell us what character, were you a character or were you?

Tim Sarrantonio

Now.

Olivia Jones

I was parade audience control. So essentially like front of house and usher for anything the stage, parades, fireworks.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

So like when that sassy elf was on TikTok for a bit and then they got taken off from TikTok, would that be the parade manager who helps make that call?

Kerrin Mitchell

Okay.

Olivia Jones

Yeah, like just making sure that folks are safe. So whether you're performing or anything else. And it can be fun and can be not, but I do have an I survived that place. I was only there for three months because it's not for me.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

So okay.

Tim Sarrantonio

So like we weren't, that it was a technicality of us being wrong, I suppose. So yeah, those are good.

Kerrin Mitchell

You know what? I feel good about all those and I like, applaud you.

Tim Sarrantonio

Those are good.

Kerrin Mitchell

I like that and fantastic, fantastic truth and a lie. So yes, I love this.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah, what a great, what a great talk.

Olivia Jones

Okay.

Kerrin Mitchell

Olivia, thank you so much for joining us today. Do you mind letting people know where they can learn more about the work you're doing? Anything you'd like to share at this point before we wrap it all up with a bow?

Olivia Jones

Yeah, absolutely. If you're interested in any of the funding programs we have at the City of San Diego, you could just look up City of San Diego cultural affairs on Google and you'll get to the things I'm doing.

Kerrin Mitchell

Look at that.

Olivia Jones

So if you're like, wow, I'd love to read some of the guidelines you're writing. You've had 26 pages of joy.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yes. How does she translate these with such artistic brilliance? Yeah.

Olivia Jones

Yeah, you could see the evolution in real time.

Kerrin Mitchell

No.

Olivia Jones

And otherwise, you could probably just find me on the Internet. My name is Olivia Jones, if you're a LinkedIn type of friend. I didn't mention that I am like black with glasses and either braids or Afro if you're looking for the picture, but I assume that you probably assumed by now. And otherwise, you yeah, I feel like those are the best places. I'm not really on social anymore. So oh yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh, good girl. Yeah, I'm with you.

Olivia Jones

So like you could find me, I bet, but I probably won't respond to you.

Kerrin Mitchell

All. Right, Olivia, thank you so much, hon. I really do appreciate you. You are just a light and I am so grateful that you joined Tim and I today.

Olivia Jones

Yeah. Thank you for having me.